

ELEMENTS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO A CONDUCIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR COMING
OUT AS LGBTQ+ AND THE RELATIONSHIPS AMONG THEM

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Abstract

As identifying as LGBTQ+ becomes less stigmatized, there is an increased need for support to these individuals as they are developing their identity. To support these individuals at home and in the community, it is important to understand what types of supports are most beneficial. Thirty-five adults participated in a 35-item survey that asked them to report their perceptions about the time they were growing up, specifically about the level of parental support they received, and their parental figures' values and beliefs and political views. The survey also asked about the geographic location in which they grew up. The purpose of this study is to explain the relationship among these variables and how they explain the variance in the age that members of the LGBTQ+ community decide to come out. The results suggested that individuals in the Southeastern region of the United States indicated their parental figures promoted particular values and beliefs less strongly than parental figures in the Northeastern and Western regions of the United States, and practiced religion more often. Parental support was found to be lowest in the Western region of the United States. The results of this study can be used by family therapists and counselors, schools, and communities to better support individuals belonging to the LGBTQ+ community.

Contents

Chapter 1.	Introduction	7
	Background	7
	Purpose	8
Chapter 2.	Literature Review	9
	Inequities Among Heterosexual and LGBTQ+ Students	9
	Victimization and Bullying	11
	The Impact of GSAs	13
	The Roles of Parental and School Support	14
	Identity Development	17
Chapter 3.	Theoretical Framework	19
Chapter 4.	Methods	24
	Participants	24
	Instrument	25
	Analyses	27
Chapter 5.	Results	29
	Descriptive Statistics	29
	Factor Analysis	32
	Regression	33
	Correlations	37
Chapter 6.	Discussion	42
	Limitations	45

References	46
Appendix	49

Tables

Table 1	Marcia's Four Identity Statuses	20
Table 2	Participants' Age Band	25
Table 3	Age of Coming Out by region	29
Table 4	Means Compared by Region	31
Table 5	Descriptive Statistics of the Variables used in the Factor Analysis	32
Table 6	Descriptive Statistics of the Factors used in Regression.....	32
Table 7	Model 1 Linear Regression	35
Table 8	Model 2 Summary	36
Table 9	Model 2 Regression with Dummy Variables	36
Table 10	Model 3 Summary	36
Table 11	Model 3 Regression with Dummy Variables	36
Table 12	Pearson Correlations Between Parental Support Variables	38
Table 13	Pearson Correlations Between Parental Support Variables and Values and Beliefs Variables.....	40
Table 14	Pearson Correlations Among Values and Beliefs Variables and Liberal to Conservative Variable	40

Figure

Figure 1.	Identity Statuses Across Bioecological Systems	23
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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Background

Identifying as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, or other term that one uses to describe their non-heterosexual orientation or gender identity (LGBTQ+), has been stigmatized in many cultures throughout the United States for some time. Examples of stigmatization include being denied the right to marry a partner of the same sex in most states in the US, the mass shooting at a gay club in Orlando, Florida in 2016, and President Donald Trump taking action to disallow transgender individuals to serve in the Armed Forces, in addition to many hate crimes that have occurred for decades all over the US. Past research has investigated many negative results of stigmatization of the LGBTQ+ community such as suicidal ideation, bullying and victimization, school absenteeism, poor academic performance, low sense of belongingness, lack of supports and resources at school, and negative familial consequences such as name calling, withdrawal of financial support, and non-acceptance (Aragon, Poteat, Espelage, & Koenig, 2014; D'Augelli, Hershberger, & Pilkington, 1998; Espelage, Aragon, Birkett, & Koenig, 2008; Higa et al., 2014; Kosciw, Greytak, Giga, Villenas, & Danischewski, 2016; McCormick, Schmidt, & Clifton, 2015a; Pilkington & D'Augelli, 1995; Robinson & Espelage, 2011; Toomey, Ryan, Diaz, & Russell, 2011). Next steps for progressive research in this field include the examination of factors that positively affect LGBTQ+ community members in order to educate society on how to support these individuals and help them live healthy and productive lives.

Purpose

During the literature review, this field of research lacked obtainable studies on the effect that geographic location or social factors, such as political and religious views and practices have on the age at which one identifies privately and publicly as LGBTQ+. This study aims to explain the relationships among these variables and how they explain the variance in the age that members of the LGBTQ+ community decide to publicly acknowledge their sexuality, or come out. In this study, the dependent variable is the age at which an individual identifies as LGBTQ+, and the independent variables are perception of political and religious views of parents, the perceived level of emotional and informational parental support, and geographic location.

My future research will expand this study to examine the relationship between the same independent variables and the individual's educational and career outcomes. Path analysis will be used to determine if the age in which someone comes out is a mediator to their educational attainment. I will also examine the correlational relationship between the age at which the individual identified and their educational and career outcomes.

Using a self-developed instrument, I was able to collect relevant data for this study. As stated previously, no research was found during the literature review that examines the variables of interest, resulting in there also being no instrument available to address all these variables. As a result, I developed a survey to gather information about each individual's demographics, the geographic area in which they were raised, their relationship with the adults that raised them, and their perceptions about the religious and political views of the households in which they were raised.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

There is relatively little published research investigating social factors such as religion, geographic location, political views, and levels of family or social support in relation to the age at which individuals belonging to the LGBTQ+ community identify privately and publicly as LGBTQ+. However, there are some studies on factors that affect academic and psychological outcomes of these individuals as youths. Several themes are prominent in the literature, which include inequities among heterosexual and LGBTQ+ students, victimization and bullying, the impact of Gay Straight Alliances (GSA), and the role of parental and school support, however, these do not include all of the variables of my interest. Many of these studies used surveys, interviews, or focus groups to gather data, and the majority of those data were collected from high schools across the nation.

Inequities Among Heterosexual and LGBTQ+ Students

Students who identify as LGBTQ+, either privately or publicly, often face many challenges at school that affect their academic and psychological outcomes and are unique to this population of students. These factors include victimization, bullying, harassment and assault, discrimination, unsupportive school staff, use of derogatory language, and limited access to resources such as informational books or websites, literature portraying successful LGBTQ+ individuals, and safe spaces. Compared to heterosexual peers, these factors alone can often lead to high rates of absenteeism, low self-esteem, thoughts of suicide, depression, poor academic performance, feeling unsafe, and overall poor psychological well-being, which are all explored in the next paragraph.

Using anonymous survey responses collected through SurveyMonkey from 13,213 middle and high school students in Dane County, Wisconsin, Robinson and Espelage (2011) found that when compared with straight students, students who identify as LGBTQ are at a higher risk of suicidal thoughts, suicide attempts, victimization by peers, and truancy. Gaps in risks of low level of school belongingness and unexcused absences among heterosexual and LGBTQ students were found to be significant in high school, but were even larger in middle school, suggesting that early intervention is needed and is why the age of coming out is important, and although sexual minority youth are at greater risk than heterosexual youth, LGBTQ youth are not homogenous in terms of educational and psychological outcomes within the population. A 2008 study showed that within the group of sexual minority youth, youth who were questioning their sexual orientation reported experiencing higher rates of teasing, drug use, and feelings of depression or suicidal thoughts than either the heterosexual group or the LGB group, and that youth questioning their sexual orientation reported higher rates of substance use, which may be related to homophobic teasing (Espelage et al., 2008). These sexually questioning youth were also more likely to rate their school climate as negative when compared to heterosexual or LGB youth.

There are a variety of discriminatory policies and practices present in our nation's schools. Examples of these policies and practices include male and female dress code requirements for pictures and graduation, prom king and queen gender requirements, whom one may attend school dances with, discussing or writing about LGBTQ topics in class, acceptable public displays of affection, the use of pronouns to describe oneself, restroom and locker room use, and forming or promoting clubs or organizations, among many others (Kosciw et al., 2016).

In a 2015 national study conducted by the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), 80% of LGBTQ students indicated that their school had anti-LGBT discriminatory policies and practices, and two-thirds of these students reported that they had personally experienced discriminatory policies and practices (Kosciw et al., 2016). Students also reported that schools often limited the inclusion of LGBTQ extracurricular activities or topics, including discouraging students from participating in sports because they were LGBTQ. Transgender students are especially targets of discriminatory policies and practices. Sixty percent of transgender students reported they were required to use the restroom and locker room of their legal sex, almost 51% had been prevented from using their preferred pronouns, and 28% of transgender students had been prohibited from wearing certain clothing because it was deemed inappropriate on the basis of their legal sex. LGBTQ students who experienced discrimination at school had lower GPAs than other students, were more than three times likely to have missed school because of safety concerns in the past month, were less likely to feel a sense of belongingness to the school community, and had lower levels of self-esteem and higher levels of depression.

Victimization and Bullying

The 2015 GLSEN study (Kosciw et al., 2016) also indicated that most LGBTQ students did not feel safe at school. Key findings in the category of school safety in this study included nearly 60% of LGBTQ students reporting that they felt unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation, while 4 in 10 students felt unsafe because of how they expressed their gender (Kosciw et al., 2016). Locker rooms and bathrooms were reported by LGBTQ students to be the most commonly avoided places in school because of the same feelings of being unsafe. School

functions and extracurricular activities were reported to be avoided by most LGBTQ students, while about 25% of those students reported avoiding them often or frequently. Victimization was found to be a significant partial mediator of LGBTQ students having higher rates of truancy, earning lower grades, and having lower educational intentions than their non-LGBTQ+ peers (Aragon et al., 2014). The 2015 GLSEN study (Kosciw et al., 2016) also found that students in the Northeast and West reported lower levels of victimization based on sexual orientation and gender identity than LGBTQ students in the South and Midwest or in small towns or rural areas, with the largest difference lying between the Northeast and the South (Kosciw et al., 2016).

Anti-LGBTQ+ language is used as insults against heterosexual youth as well as LGBTQ+ youth, and is not only used by students but sometimes by faculty and staff. This pervasiveness of anti-LGBTQ+ language in schools creates a hostile environment for sexual minority youth and may also contribute to a negative school environment for heterosexual youth (Robinson & Espelage, 2011). In the same GLSEN study (Kosciw et al., 2016) as discussed above, it was found that over 66% of LGBTQ students often or frequently heard the word “gay” used in a negative way at school, and more than 50% of LGBTQ students often or frequently heard homophobic remarks such as “dyke” or “fag” used at school (Kosciw et al., 2016). Negative remarks about gender expression were heard by slightly less than two-thirds of LGBTQ students often or frequently at school, with two-fifths of students hearing negative remarks specifically about transgender people like “tranny” or “he/she” often or frequently at school. More surprisingly, however, is that more than half of LGBTQ students reported hearing homophobic remarks made by school faculty and staff, and nearly 66% heard remarks about students’ gender expression from school faculty and staff. When analyzing the data by region, it

was found that LGBTQ students in the West and Northeast reported lower frequencies of hearing anti-gay remarks than students in the South and Midwest.

Harassment is often used as an umbrella term to include verbal, physical, and sexual harassment, but also includes relational aggression (spreading rumors and purposeful exclusion) (Crick et al., as cited in Moretti, Holland, & McKay, 2001), cyberbullying (Smith et al., 2008 as cited in Menesini & Nocentini, 2009), and property theft or damage. Close to 90% of LGBTQ students reported being harassed at school, with sexual orientation and gender expression being the most common reasons (Kosciw et al., 2016). Sexual orientation, gender expression, and gender are the primary reasons that 1 in 6 LGBTQ students reported being physically assaulted at school in the last year. However, the majority of students who were harassed or assaulted at school did not report the incident. The most common reasons for not reporting victimization incidents were that LGBTQ students did not feel that effective intervention would occur and feared that the situation would only be made worse by reporting it. When describing how staff responded to these incidents of victimization, 63.5% of LGBTQ students reported that staff did nothing or told the student to ignore it; 25% of students were told to change their behavior and not act “so gay” or to dress in a different way.

The Impact of GSAs

Gay Straight Alliances are school-level organizations that provide students with support. Griffin and her colleagues (2004) described the four prominent roles played by GSAs in schools today as offering counseling and support to LGBT students; providing safe spaces for LGBT students and their friends to socialize and share interests; serving as the school’s primary vehicle for increasing educational efforts and awareness about LGBT safety issues in schools; and being

a part of broader school efforts to make schools safe for LGBT students (as cited in Currie, Mayberry, & Cheneville, 2012). These organizations place an emphasis on support and advocacy, creating a platform for students to access resources and to develop and strengthen their relationships with peers in order to empower themselves (McCormick, Schmidt, & Clifton, 2015b). The goal of Gay Straight Alliances is to improve social and academic aspects of education through belongingness. These organizations have been found to be associated with positive youth development and safe environments. Schools that have GSAs are reported to have a higher rating of safety by students (Toomey et al., 2011). GSA participation was not found to affect the health and academic outcomes of participants, but GSA presence in school was found to affect these outcomes in students. It was also found that the perception of GSA effectiveness is positively associated with college level educational attainment and negatively associated with depression and issues related to substance abuse, while GSA presence is associated with perceptions of safer school climates, and in turn student well-being, that continues into young adulthood. Lifetime suicide risk was not buffered by participation in GSAs for youth that experienced high levels of victimization based on sexual orientation. If individuals come out during adolescence, they may seek the help of GSAs or other community programs when they experience difficulties.

The Role of Parental and School Support

Receiving support at home and at school is vital to the success and well-being of LGBTQ+ youth. Espelage et al. (2008) reported that sexual orientation did not determine the environment, but the environment moderated the outcomes associated with sexual orientation. Sexual minority youth were more likely to be depressed, have suicidal feelings, and use drugs if

their families and communities were not supportive of them. Sexual minority youth reported higher rates of depression-suicidal feelings and alcohol-marijuana use, but those who reported higher levels of support reported significantly lower levels of depression-suicidal feelings and alcohol-marijuana use. Multiple studies have shown that perceived parental support reduced internalized and externalized behaviors and negative psychological outcomes in LGB youth. LGBTQ students who did not plan to finish high school reported that hostile school climates and mental health concerns were the reason why (Kosciw et al., 2016). Students who had experienced high levels of in-school victimization had lower GPAs than other students, were less likely to pursue post-secondary education, were three times as likely to have missed school in the last month because they had safety concerns, were less likely to feel a sense of belongingness to their school community, and had lower levels of self-esteem and higher levels of depression. Data collected in the 2015 GLSEN study show that Southern and Midwestern students had less access to LGBTQ-related resources and supports such as GSAs and supportive school staff and administration than Northeastern and Western students (Kosciw et al., 2016).

Gay-Straight Alliances or other similar student clubs were present in just over half of LGBTQ students' schools (Kosciw et al., 2016). A little over one-third of students reported that they felt their school administration was supportive of LGBT students, while almost all students could identify at least one school staff member that they thought was supportive of LGBT students. About 20% of students were taught positive representations of LGBTQ people, history, or events in their classes, but nearly the same number were taught negative content about LGBTQ contexts, and most students reported not having access to LGBTQ-related topics through their school library, internet, textbooks, or other assigned readings. Few students

reported that their school had a comprehensive anti-bullying/harassment policy that specifically included protections for sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. The students who did report these positive variables present in their school experienced a more positive and safer school environment.

School districts should implement bullying and violence programs; furthermore, the programs should incorporate discussions about sexual orientation and gender identity in order to help foster a safer environment and more positive outcomes for LGBTQ+ students. Comprehensive policies and laws addressing bias-based bullying and harassment should be implemented as well (Kosciw et al., 2010 as cited in Aragon et al., 2014). Schools should initiate GSAs (Aragon et al., 2014; Murphy, 2012), and educators must closely examine their attitudes towards LGBTQ+ youth while being conscious of the fact that the educators themselves may be contributing to a negative and hostile school environment (Aragon et al., 2014). Positive representation of the LGBTQ+ segment of society should be infused into the curriculum, just as it has been with racial minorities and people with disabilities.

Support from family includes that aspect of acceptance. Ryan and colleagues (2010) found that family acceptance did not vary based on gender, sexual identity, or transgender identity, but did vary based on characteristics of the family such as culture, socioeconomic status, and religion. Family acceptance was found to be associated with young adult positive health outcomes, such as self-esteem, social support and general health, and protective for negative health outcomes such as depression, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation and attempts. Sexual risk outcomes were not found to have a clear association with family

acceptance. While controlling for family background variables, family acceptance was found to persist.

Identity Development

The most frequently mentioned negative aspect of identifying as LGBTQ is that individuals felt a need to hide it from others such as family, school, and the community (Higa et al., 2014). Individuals reported that they worried about “being outed” before they were ready and having labels chosen for them by others, which indicates that the youth faced resistance in having control over choosing how they labeled themselves and when they wanted to publicly identify as LGBTQ. Sexual minority youth reported that they felt they could not freely express themselves due to rigid gender roles within their cultures.

Many LGBTQ+ youth feel isolated, primarily at school, because they are the only LGBTQ+ individual that they know of, so they feel that they have no one to share experiences with (Higa et al., 2014). These sexual minority youths also reported that even within the LGBTQ+ community they sometimes felt that finding adult support was difficult because older LGBTQ+ individuals often did not “come out” until post-high school so they do not fully understand what today’s youth are experiencing. The most common concerns among sexual minority youth in regards to family is experiencing or fearing rejection, being kicked out of their homes, and having financial support taken away if their parents or family members find out about their LGBTQ+ identity. These youths also felt that they needed to hide their identity and that they could not talk openly about their identity to family members because of previous gay-negative remarks made by their families.

Positive methods used by some LGBTQ+ youth for coping with a stigmatized identity include fighting back, advocating for LGBTQ+ rights, and developing a sense of self-acceptance which includes understanding their uniqueness and becoming comfortable with themselves {Higa, 2014, Negative and Positive Factors Associated with the Well-Being of Lesbian`, Gay`, Bisexual`, Transgender`, Queer`, and Questioning (LGBTQ) Youth}. Positive factors in regards to disclosing their identities to their families included conditional and unconditional acceptance, full acceptance mostly by siblings, the welcoming of romantic partners, being able to openly discuss their identities as LGBTQ+, and engagement in LGBTQ+ activism by family members.

CHAPTER 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Research on social factors that affect the ages at which individuals in the LGBTQ+ community come out, can be supported by a framework centered on James Marcia's statuses of identity and Urie Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems model of human development and socialization.

Erik Erikson's stages of psychosocial development each are represented by a critical issue that reaches a climax, and results in either positive or negative contributions to one's identity (Miller, 2016) while focusing on the relationship between the individual and society (Kasinath, 2013). The stages are successive and build on one another, transforming identity from stage to stage, and aspects of early identity influence later identity (Miller, 2016). James Marcia expanded upon Erikson's psychosocial development theory focusing on exploration and commitment and included four identity statuses: identity diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and identity achievement (Kasinath, 2013). These four identity statuses are described in Table 1.

Attaining a mature identity depends on crisis and commitment. Marcia defined crisis and commitment as "Crisis refers to times during adolescence when the individual seems to be actively involved in choosing among alternative occupations and beliefs. Commitment refers to the degree of personal investment the individual expresses in an occupation or belief" (quoted in Kasinath, 2013, p.2). During the search for a sense of identity, some adolescents may experience characteristics from any of the statuses and may drift aimlessly or be distressed, while others will have self-chosen goals or values to pursue and guide them. Role confusion is common among adolescents and can be even more so for LGBTQ+ students. The cause of role confusion is the inability to formulate clear ideas, and to have conflict about gender roles and occupational

choices. One's society or culture contributes to what is considered acceptable gender roles and occupational choices, which may not align with the sense of identity an LGBTQ+ youth is developing.

Table 1.
James Marcia's Four Identity Statuses

Identity status	Crisis	Commitment	Characteristics
Identity Diffusion	Crisis has not yet been experienced because there has not been much serious thought given to occupational choice, values, or gender roles.	Commitment is weak because as positive and negative feedback is received about occupational choice, values, and gender roles, the individual's ideas change.	Needs leadership, is disorganized and impulsive, and has low self-esteem. Avoids school, work, and interpersonal relationships.
Foreclosure	Crisis has not been experienced because the individual is confident in their identity.	Commitment is strong because the individual has accepted the values and beliefs of their family or parents.	Has strong identification with parents and authority figures and seeks their approval. Close-minded and feels like they are better than peers.
Moratorium	Crisis has been partially experienced because some thought has been given to identity related questions	Commitment is weak because a result that is satisfactory has not yet been reached.	May reject or rebel against parental and societal values. Anxious, and day dreams often, may have short lived relationships.
Identity	Crisis has been fully experienced because there has been serious thought and exploration regarding occupational choice, values, and gender roles.	Commitment is strong because some self-chosen commitments to identity have been made.	Builds close interpersonal relationships, handles stress well, planful and logical in decision making, and has high self-esteem.

Note. Adapted from Kasinath, H. M. (2013). Adolescence: Search for an Identity. *Journal on Educational Psychology*, 7(1), 1-6.

The bioecological systems theory explains human development through five systems in which individuals constantly interact. The systems are microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The microsystem is the system closest to the person and includes family, friends, school, religious groups, clubs, and so on. The mesosystem is outside of the microsystem and includes the interactions between members of different microsystems, for example, the relationship and interactions between the child's school and parents. The exosystem is positioned outside of the mesosystem and includes

the media, friends of the family, legal or social services in the community, and neighbors. These factors do not directly relate to the individual. For example, the loss of a parent's job is not directly related to the individual. The macrosystem encompasses the attitudes, beliefs, and ideologies of the culture, which may affect the individual by the formation of laws. The chronosystem stretches through all other systems and includes the events and transitions that happen over the course of the individual's life. In essence, the chronosystem is time. The individual as well as the individual's personal characteristics such as sexual orientation, age, gender identity, health, and so on, should be thought of as being the center of these systems. All of these systems influence the development of the individual. For an LGBTQ+ individual, these surrounding environmental factors may contribute to negative outcomes for the individual if they are not supportive of the individual's identity as LGBTQ+.

Marcia's four identity statuses are experienced across all systems included in Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model. An individual can experience identity diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and identity achievement throughout the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem, with the chronosystem spanning all of them. Figure 1 provides a visual of how these two theories are blended to frame this study. Foreclosure, identity diffusion, moratorium, and identity achievement take place while interacting with close friends and family, peers, and the community across time. The present study is framed by the following research questions:

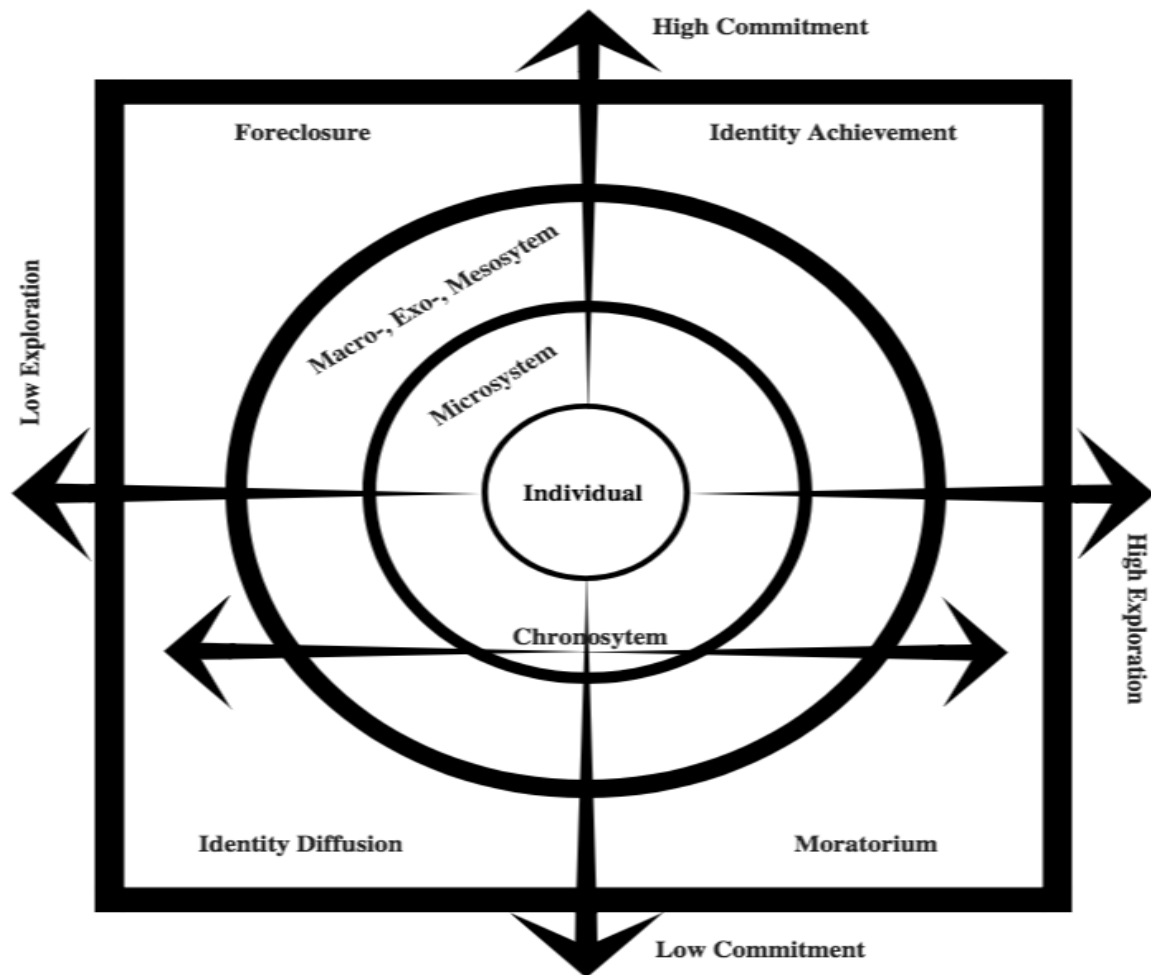
1. Are the perceptions of emotional and informational parental support, the extent of tolerance in their parents' values and beliefs, and whether their parents held more liberal

or conservative political views related to the age at which the individual identified as LGBTQ+?

2. Does geographic region or locale explain the age that individuals come out?
3. Is there a correlation between perceived parental support and perceived extent of tolerance in parental values and beliefs?
4. Does whether or not an individual's parental figures hold a college degree and the frequency of their religious practices affect the age at which an individual comes out as LGBTQ+?

Expected outcomes of this study are that individuals will identify as LGBTQ+ at an earlier age if they perceive their parents' political views to be more liberal than conservative, or if they perceive their parents' religious views and practices as more relaxed or with a higher degree of tolerance; or if they perceive their parents as emotionally supportive. It is also expected that individuals raised in traditionally more conservative geographic regions or locales will come out at a later age. A positive correlation is also expected between perceived parental support and perceived tolerance in parental values and beliefs.

Figure 1.
Identity Statuses Across Bioecological Systems



CHAPTER 4. METHODS

Participants

Participants included members of the LGBTQ+ community who were 18 years old or older and identified as LGBTQ+. The sample frame consisted of participants who were accessed through several outlets to include the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa LGBTQ+ Student Services, LGBTQ+ Commission, University of Reno's Queer Student Union, and Pride at Work Hawai'i. Any other adult individuals that were referred by participants were accepted as a convenience sample. Participants were encouraged to forward the electronic survey to other individuals they thought may be interested in participating. Due to the anonymity of this research design, I did not attempt to balance participant gender or any other characteristic. Individuals who included responses in their surveys that contradicted one another, were reported in the results but excluded from the analysis, for example, an individual that indicated he or she did not obtain a high school diploma or GED, and also indicated that his or her highest level of education completed is a doctorate degree. I cannot report the response rate due to the nature of the sample that was collected through word of mouth.

Survey respondents fell within 9 age bands, as can be seen in Table 2. The race/ethnicity of the majority of participants was either White/Caucasian (45.71%) or Asian/Pacific Islander (28.57%). Over 82% of participants indicated that they had completed a college degree, either associate, bachelor, or graduate, and over 65% of participants reported that at least one adult in the household in which they grew up had also completed either an associate, bachelor, or graduate degree. Of the 35 survey respondents, 19 identified as gay men (54.29%), eight as bisexual (22.86%), seven as lesbians (20%), three as queer (8.57%), two as gender neutral

(5.71%), one as bi-gender (2.86%), and one as pansexual (2.86%).

Table 2

Participants' Age Band

Age band (years)	n
18–22	1
23–27	10
28–32	5
33–37	3
38–42	3
43–47	1
48–54	6
70–79	1

Instrument

The instrument used to collect data in this study is a self-developed 35 question survey that includes questions and statements regarding the individuals' sexuality and gender identity, religious and political views and practices of the individual and of the adults in the household in which they were raised, the level of support provided to the individual, educational attainment, and demographic information. Recommendations from a panel of content experts were implemented to obtain content validity on the representativeness and clarity of items. As the survey was developed, I solicited feedback from members of the LGBTQ+ community to ensure that the survey was not offensive in any nature, and that the questions were understood, and the survey also included an open-ended item where respondents were asked if they found anything offensive or confusing about the survey. All participants indicated that the survey was not offensive or confusing. Surveys were distributed and collected electronically. An email consisted of an initial request for participation and a letter of anonymity. The survey was developed and collected through SurveyMonkey, and to maintain a high level of anonymity, email and IP addresses were not tracked. Paper copies were not placed at the organizations mentioned above

because the points of contact for those organizations did not believe individuals would be interested in completing a paper version of the survey. The complete survey is available in the Appendix.

Item 11 pertained to what region the individual primarily grew up in (northeast, southwest, southeast, west, Midwest, or outside the US), and item 12 asked how they would describe that community (coastal, inland, island, rural, and so forth). These questions were included in the survey to determine whether or not certain locations, especially in the US, are perceived as more supportive than others by individuals who are considering coming out. The construct of parental support was measured through the survey by questions that prompted responses of how comfortable the individual was with the adults who raised them (Items 14 and 17, “comfort”), whether or not they could depend on the adults to listen when they needed to talk (Items 15 and 18, “listen”), and if the adults that raised them used to provide information or advice when needed (Items 16 and 19, “information”). The survey also measured each individual’s perception of the values and beliefs of the adults which raised them. Questions about values and beliefs included prompts about their parental figures’ primary religion (Items 21 and 24), frequency of religious services or practices (Items 22 and 25, “religious frequency”), and pertained to how strongly the adults promoted kindness (“kindness”), the appreciation of differences among people (“differences”), that it is okay to be LGBTQ+ (“LGBTQ+”), that everyone should be treated equally (“equality”), and that marriage can be between anyone (“marriage”) (Items 23 and 26). Political views of the adults that the participants were raised by were also measured through the survey by questions such as which political party the adults identified with (Items 28 and 31, “political party”), how often politics were discussed in the

household (Items 29 and 32, “political frequency”), and how conservative or liberal the individual felt the adults’ political views were (Items 30 and 33, “liberal to conservative”).

The construct of belief and values was measured using five variables, each on a four-point Likert scale. The variables were phrased as the following statements: showing kindness to everyone, no matter the person’s beliefs; differences among people should be appreciated; it is okay to be LGBTQ+; everyone should be treated equally, and; marriage can be between anyone. The Likert scale ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 4 (*strongly*). All questions that pertained to the perception of the adults were asked individually for each of two adults, and then averaged together for use in the analyses.

Analyses

I examined descriptive statistics to determine differences of means by region. The means of variables by geographic region were examined to determine if there was a difference, on average, between individuals that were raised in the Northeast (Maine, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Hampshire, Vermont, New York, Delaware, Maryland), Southeast (West Virginia, Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, Florida), and West (Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, Washington, Oregon, Utah, Nevada, California, Alaska, Hawai'i) of the United States. These were the only regions examined because those are the only regions inside the United States that were reported by participants. Correlations among the variables measuring the construct of parental support, correlations among variables measuring values and beliefs, and finally the correlations between those variables and political views, were examined and found to be statistically significant.

In order to address the first research question, I used multiple linear regression to determine if the perceptions of emotional and informational parental support, the extent of tolerance in their parents' values and beliefs, whether their parents held more liberal or conservative political views, if their parental figures held a college degree or not, and their parental figures' religious frequency were related to the age at which the individual identified as LGBTQ+. To determine if geographic region or locale explains the age of coming out (second research question), I used two regressions with dummy variables, and to determine if there is there a correlation between perceived parental support and perceived extent of tolerance in parental values and beliefs (third research question), I used Pearson correlations.

CHAPTER 5. RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Means of the age at which one identified to his or her self, to another person, and to their peers or community were examined by geographic region. Individuals selected the age band they belonged to, at the age of coming out to themselves, another person, and to their peers or community, which I coded as 1-8 for the analyses. Means and standard deviations can be found in Table 3, with an explanation of the means in the note. The West ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 1.20$) had a slightly higher mean of the age of which one identifies as LGBTQ+ to his or herself than the Northeast ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 0.00$), Southeast ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 2.06$), and outside the US ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 1.38$). The West ($M = 4.67$, $SD = 1.41$) also had the highest mean of the age at which one identifies to another person when compared to the Northeast ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 0.50$), the Southeast ($M = 4.57$, $SD = 1.51$), and outside the US ($M = 4.33$, $SD = .85$). The Southeast ($M = 5.57$, $SD = 1.81$) had the highest mean of the age at which one identifies to his or her peers or community when compared to the Northeast ($M = 4.5$, $SD = .58$), West ($M = 5.56$, $SD = 1.82$), and outside the US ($M = 5.33$, $SD = 1.37$).

Table 3
Age of Coming Out Compared by Region

Region	<i>n</i>	IDSelf	<i>SD</i>	IDAnother	<i>SD</i>	IDPeers	<i>SD</i>
Northeast	4	3.00	.00	3.75	.50	4.50	.58
Southeast	7	3.71	2.06	4.57	1.51	5.57	1.81
West	18	3.83	1.20	4.67	1.41	5.56	1.82
Outside US	6	3.50	1.38	4.33	.82	5.33	1.37

Note. 3 = 28-32 years, 4 = 33-37 years, 5 = 38-42 years, 6 = 43-47 years

Means across the parental figure support construct, and the values and beliefs construct were examined by geographic location. Each of these variables was measured on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 4 (*always*). Means in the Northeastern, Southeastern,

and Western United States were similar for the variable measuring an individual's comfort with going to their parental figure with any issue, $M = 2.38$, $SD = 1.11$, $M = 2.36$, $SD = .69$, and $M = 2.28$, $SD = .71$, respectively, and also for the variable measuring how well an individual felt they could depend on their parental figures to listen when they needed to talk, $M = 2.87$, $SD = 1.32$, $M = 2.249$, $SD = 1.02$ and $M = 2.250$, $SD = .81$. The variable representing information and advice provided by the parental figures varied slightly, with the Northeast $M = 3.250$, $SD = 1.50$, while the Southeast $M = 2.500$, $SD = 1.02$, and West $M = 2.250$, $SD = .81$.

The frequency at which individuals' parental figures practiced religion or attended religious services was highest in the Southeast, $M = 3.571$, $SD = 1.27$, while the Northeast was the least at $M = 1.333$, $SD = 2.31$, and the West $M = 3.031$, $SD = 1.60$. Religious frequency was measured through a multiple choice answer that ranged from 0 (*never*) to 5 (*two or more times per week*).

Means were examined by region and it was found that the Southeast region of the United States had lower means than the Northeast and West regions in most of the values and beliefs variables, but had higher means than the West in the parental support variables. The Southeast had the lowest means for showing kindness to everyone, it is okay to be LGBTQ+, everyone should be treated equally, and marriage can be between anyone. For the variable measuring differences among people should be appreciated, the Southeast had a lower mean than the West, but a higher mean than the Northeast. The variable "religious frequency" had the highest mean in the Southeast and the lowest mean in the Northeast, indicating that parental figures in the Southeast practice religion more often than parental figures in the West and Northeast. The means of each of showing kindness to everyone, no matter the person's beliefs, differences

among people should be appreciated, it is okay to be LGBTQ+, everyone should be treated equally, and marriage can be between anyone were highest in the West, kindness $M = 3.250$, $SD = .58$, difference $M = 2.656$, $SD = .72$, LGBTQ+ $M = 1.867$, $SD = .93$, equality $M = 2.844$, $SD = .79$, and marriage $M = 1.800$, $SD = 1.10$, meaning that individuals perceived their parental figures in the West to promote these values and beliefs more strongly than those in the Southeast and Northeast. The means from outside the US are not used for comparisons because the countries reported by individuals differ greatly, and I did not feel that the results for outside the US could be used in a meaningful way. Table 4 represents the means and sample sizes of all geographic locations collected from participants across the variables discussed.

Table 4
Means Compared by Region

Region	Mean n	Comf	Listen	Info	RelFrq	Kind	Diff	LGBTQ	Equal	Marr
Northeast U.S.	3–4	2.38	2.88	3.25	1.33	2.67	2.17	1.83	2.50	1.50
Southeast U.S.	7	2.36	2.43	2.50	3.57	2.64	2.43	1.07	2.29	1.00
West U.S.	15–18	2.28	2.25	2.50	3.03	3.25	2.66	1.87	2.84	1.80
Outside the US	6	2.75	2.67	2.50	2.42	3.83	3.50	2.10	3.58	1.83
Total	30–35	2.39	2.43	2.59	2.88	3.17	1.72	1.72	2.83	1.60

Note. Hyphenated n represents the range of Mean sample sizes for those variables.

Minimums, maximums, means, and standard deviations for variables that I used in factor analyses are available in Table 5, while Table 6 is a table of descriptive statistics of the factors I used in multiple regression (age of coming out, parental support, and parental tolerance). The factor scores are centered with a mean of 0.00, and standard deviations of approximately 1.00.

Table 5
Descriptive Statistics of the Variables used in the Factor Analyses

Variable	<i>n</i>	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	S.D.
Age Identified ^a					
To Self	35	1	7	3.66	1.33
To Another	35	2	7	4.49	1.27
To Peers	35	2	8	5.40	1.63
Parental Support ^b	35				
Comfort	35	1	4	2.39	0.80
Information	35	1	4	2.59	0.91
Listening	35	1	4	2.43	0.92
Tolerance ^c					
LGBTQ+	30	1	3.5	1.71	0.88
Marriage	31	1	4	1.60	0.99
Respect ^c					
Equality	32	1	4	2.83	0.91
Kindness	32	1	4	3.17	0.79
Differences	32	1	4	2.72	0.85

Note. ^a 1 = 18–22 years, 2 = 23–27 years, 7 = 48–54 years, 8 = 70–79 years

^b 4 = Very comfortable or always

^c 3 = Moderately, 4 = Strongly

Table 6
Descriptive Statistics of the Factors used in the Regression

	<i>n</i>	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	S.D.
Age Identified	35	-1.80	2.16	0.00	0.94
Support	35	-1.78	1.87	0.00	1.00
Respect	30	-2.59	1.60	0.00	1.00
Tolerance	30	-1.07	2.12	0.00	1.00

Factor Analysis

Two factor analyses were conducted to seek latent variables measured by the survey. The first factor analysis was conducted on three variables which measured the age at which an individual identified (1) to themselves, (2) to another person, and (3) to their peers or community. The analysis resulted in one factor, referred to as “coming out,” being extracted with IDself ($\lambda = .856$), IDanother ($\lambda = .879$), and IDpeers ($\lambda = .779$) all loading highly. I used principal axis factoring to extract, which resulted in 80.1% of variance being explained by the

one factor. I saved a factor score for each case and added them to the data to use in linear regression. Cronbach's $\alpha = .867$, indicating a high level on internal reliability for this scale.

A second factor analysis was conducted using the maximum likelihood extraction method on five items measuring each individual's perception of their parental figures' tolerance of difference among people. I checked the assumption of multivariate normality using Q-Q Plots, skewness, and kurtosis. Although these are methods for univariate normality, here, I used them to approximate the multivariate normality. Skewness and kurtosis were within 2 for all variables, so the maximum likelihood factor analysis was performed on the variables measuring the values and beliefs construct. The Varimax rotated solution resulted in EqualityAvg ($\lambda = .890$), KindnessAvg ($\lambda = .910$), and DiffAvg ($\lambda = .800$) loaded highly on the first factor, called "respect," while LGBTQAvg ($\lambda = .921$), and MarriageAvg ($\lambda = .953$) loaded highly on the second factor, named "tolerance," Using the two factor model, 90.4% of total variance is explained, and 85.1% of common variance is explained through the two extracted factors. Cronbach's $\alpha = .952$, indicating a high level on internal reliability for "tolerance," and Cronbach's $\alpha = .907$ for "respect," also indicating a high level of internal reliability.

Regression

Multiple linear regression was used to determine whether the perceptions of emotional and informational parental support, the extent of tolerance in their parents' values and beliefs, and whether their parents held more liberal or conservative political views, if their parental figures held a college degree or not, and their parental figures' religious frequency were related to the age at which the individual identifies as LGBTQ+. The overall statistic was not found to be statistically significant ($R^2 = .379$, $F(5, 29) = 2.34$, $p = .066$). The six predictors, "support,"

“tolerance,” “respect,” “liberal to conservative,” “parent college degree,” and “religious frequency” accounted for only 37.9% of the variance in “coming out,” ($R^2 = .379$). The only independent variable that had a statistically significant effect on “coming out” was “parent college degree.” The unstandardized regression coefficient (β) for “support” was $-.283$ ($t(29) = -1.30$, $p = .207$), “tolerance” $\beta = -.163$ ($t(29) = -.816$, $p = .423$), “respect” $\beta = .153$ ($t(29) = .633$, $p = .533$), “liberal to conservative” $\beta = -.108$ ($t(26) = -.453$, $p = .655$), “parent college degree” was $.258$, ($t(29) = 2.97$, $p = .007$), and for “religious frequency” was $\beta = .160$ ($t(29) = 1.76$, $p = .091$). This model estimate indicated that “parent college degree” does have an statistically significant effect on the age of coming out as LGBTQ+. If the parent attained a college degree, the age in which an individual comes out was .258 of a four-year age band (12.4 months) higher than those individuals whose parent did not attain a college degree, while controlling for support, tolerance, respect, political views, and religious frequency. Results can be found in Table 7.

Equation 1

$$\text{Coming Out} = .261 + -.023\text{Support} + -.036\text{Tolerance} + .153\text{Respect} + \\ -.138\text{LiberalToConservative} + .258\text{ParentDegree} + .160\text{ReligiousFrequency} + e.$$

Table 7

Model 1 Linear Regression

Variable	β	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
(Constant)	-1.406	.885	-1.588	.126
Support	-.283	.218	-1.299	.207
Tolerance	-.163	.200	-.816	.423
Respect	.153	.242	.633	.533
Liberal to Conservative	-.108	.238	-.453	.655
Parent College Degree	.258	.087	2.969	.007**
Religious Frequency	.160	.091	1.762	.091

**, $p < .01$

I estimated two regression models using dummy variables to determine if geographic location or geographic locale explain the age at which someone comes out as LGBTQ+. The

geographic locations (Model 2) were dummy coded as “West or not,” “Northeast or not” “Southeast or not,” and “outside the US or not,” using West as the reference group because it had the largest sample size. The geographic locales (Model 3) were dummy coded as “suburban or not,” “urban or not,” “rural or not,” “coastal or not,” and “island or not,” with suburban being used as the reference group because it had the largest sample size.

Model 2 resulted in an overall model estimate that was not statistically significant ($R^2 = .056$, $F(3, 34) = 0.616$, $p = .610$). The unstandardized regression coefficient (β) for “Southeast” was $-.064$ ($t(34) = -1.49$, $p = .882$), “Northeast” $\beta = -.697$ ($t(34) = -1.32$, $p = .197$), and “outside the US” $\beta = -.239$ ($t(34) = -.530$, $p = .600$). This model indicates that when compared to individuals raised in the West, individuals raised in the Northeast, Southeast, and outside the US come out at an earlier age. Results can be found in Tables 8 and 9.

Model 3 resulted in an overall model estimate that was not statistically significant ($R^2 = .049$, $F(4, 34) = 0.389$, $p = .815$). The unstandardized regression coefficient (β) for “urban” was $-.529$ ($t(34) = -1.24$, $p = .224$), “rural” $\beta = -.279$ ($t(34) = -.438$, $p = .664$), “coastal” $\beta = -.226$ ($t(34) = -.302$, $p = .765$), and “island” $\beta = -.209$ ($t(34) = -.477$, $p = .637$). These findings indicate that when compared to individuals raised in a suburban community, individuals raised in a urban, rural, coastal, or island community come out at an earlier age. Results can be found in Tables 10 and 11.

Equation 2

$$\text{Coming Out} = .133 + -.064\text{Southeast} + -.697\text{Northeast} + -.239\text{OutsideUS} + e.$$

Table 8

Model 2 Summary

Model 2	<i>df</i>	F	<i>p</i>
Regression	3	.616	.610
Residual	31		
Total	34		
$R^2 = .056$			

Table 9

Model 2 Regression with Dummy Variables

Variable	β	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
(Constant)	.133	.226	.59	.559
Southeast	-.064	.426	-.15	.882
Northeast	-.697	.529	-1.32	.197
Outside US	-.239	.451	-.53	.600

Equation 3

$$\text{Coming Out} = .242 + -.529\text{Urban} + -.279\text{Rural} + -.226\text{Coastal} + -.209\text{Island} + e.$$

Table 10

Model 3 Summary

Model 3	<i>df</i>	F	<i>p</i>
Regression	4	.389	.815
Residual	30		
Total	34		
$R^2 = .049$			

Table 11

Model 3 Regression with Dummy Variables

Variable	β	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
(Constant)	.242	.294	.82	.418
Urban	-.529	.427	-1.24	.224
Rural	-.279	.636	-.44	.664
Coastal	-.226	.751	-.30	.765
Island	-.209	.439	-.48	.637

Correlations

Statistically significant, moderate, positive correlations were found between the age at which an individual comes out to oneself, the age at which they came out to another person, and the age at which they came out to their peers and community (Pearson's $r = .755$, $p = .000$, and Pearson's $r = .655$, $p = .000$, respectively). Of course, if an individual is older when they come out to themselves, then they will be older when they come out to another person and eventually their peers and community. There was also a statistically significant correlation found between the age that an individual comes out to another person for the first time and the age at which they came out to their peers and community (Pearson's $r = .695$, $p = .000$).

The construct of parental support was also found to have statistically significant, highly positive correlations between the variables used to measure parental support. The level of comfort an individual felt going to their parent figures with any problem or issue was highly, positively correlated with depending on those parent figures to listen when the individual needed to talk and to provide information or advice to the individual about a situation as needed, Pearson's $r = .818$, $p = .000$, and Pearson's $r = .794$, $p = .000$, respectively. Depending on their parent figures to listen when the individual needed to talk and to provide information or advice to the individual about a situation as needed were also highly, positively correlated, Pearson's $r = .871$, $p = .000$, indicating that individuals who were more comfortable going to their parental figures with any issue or concern also perceived their parental figures to more often listen when the individual needed to talk and to provide information or advice when the individual needed it. Statistically significant, low, positive correlation were found between the frequency that the individual's parental figures attended religious practices and the level of comfort the individual

felt going to their parental figures with any problem or issue, and their parental figures providing advice or information as the individual needed, Pearson's $r = .361$, $p = .042$, and Pearson's $r = .447$, $p = .010$, respectively, indicating that the individuals whose parental figures practiced religion more often felt more comfortable going to their parental figures with any problem or issue and perceived the parental figures to more often provide information and advice when needed. These correlations can be found in Table 12.

Table 12
Pearson Correlations Between Parental Support Variables

	ComfAvg	ListenAvg	InfoAvg
ListenAvg	.818*		
InfoAvg	.794**	.871**	
RelFreq	.361*	.294	.447*

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

A majority of the variables measuring the values and beliefs of the parental figures were found to be highly, positively correlated with the variables measuring parental support. The only variable not correlated with any other variable was how strongly the parental figures promoted showing kindness to everyone, no matter that person's beliefs. Kindness had lower variation and higher endorsement than the other variables, so this weak correlation may have been an artifact of how sensitive the question wording was to variation in perceptions of parental kindness. How strongly the parental figures promoted that differences among people should be appreciated was weakly, positively correlated with the parental comfort variable discussed earlier, Pearson's $r = .360$, $p = .043$. Parental figures promoting that it is okay to be LGBTQ+ was moderately, positively correlated with the level of comfort the individual felt going to the parental figures, and with depending on their parental figures to listen when they needed to talk, Pearson's $r =$

.509, $p = .004$, Pearson's $r = .438$, $p = .016$, respectively. The variable "everyone should be treated equally" was moderately, positively correlated with all three of the variables measuring the parental support construct. The strength with which parental figures promoted "marriage can be between anyone" has a low, positive correlation with the parental figure comfort variable and the parental figure listening variable, Pearson's $r = .427$, $p = .017$, and Pearson's $r = .358$, $p = .048$, respectively. These correlations indicate that when individuals were more comfortable with their parental figures, they perceived them to promote appreciating differences among people, it is okay to be LGBTQ+, everyone should be treated equally, and marriage can be between anyone more strongly than those individuals that had a lower level of comfort with their parental figures, and that individuals who felt their parental figures more often listened when they needed to talk also perceived their parental figures to promote those values and beliefs more strongly than individuals who felt their parental figures less often listened. "Listen" was found to be positively correlated with "LGBTQ+," "equality," and "marriage" meaning that individuals who felt their parental figures more often listened when they needed to talk also perceived their parental figures to promote those values and beliefs more strongly than individuals who felt their parental figures less often listened. "Information" was only found to be statistically significantly correlated with "equality." This positive correlation between the two variable indicated that individuals who felt their parental figures more often provided information and support when they needed it perceived their parental figures to promote treating everyone equally more strongly than those individuals who felt their parental figures less often provided information and advice. These correlations can be found in Table 13.

Table 13

Pearson Correlations Between Parental Support Variables and Values and Beliefs Variables

	DiffAvg	LGBTQAvg	EqualityAvg	MarriageAvg
ComfAvg	.360*	.509**	.704**	.427*
ListenAvg	.212	.438*	.659**	.358*
InfoAvg	.157	.290	.554**	.235

**, Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*, Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Finally, statistically significant correlations were found among the variables measuring the beliefs and values of the parental figures, and also between those variables and a variable measuring how liberal or conservative the individual thought their parental figures political views were. The correlations among the values and beliefs variables were found to range from low-positive to high-positive, and the correlations between the values and beliefs variables and the liberal to conservative variable were all moderate and negative, meaning that the more conservative an individual perceived their parental figures' political views to be, the weaker they perceived their parental figures to promote that everyone should be treated equally, it is okay to be LGBTQ+, and that marriage can be between anyone. These correlations can be found in Table 14.

Table 14

Pearson Correlations Among Values and Beliefs Variables and Liberal to Conservative Variable

	DiffAvg	LGBTQAvg	EqualityAvg	MarriageAvg
LGBTQAvg	.457*			
EqualityAvg	.350*	.585*		
MarriageAvg	.424*	.916**	.435*	
Lib_ConAvg	-.299	-.589**	-.459**	-.553**

**, Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*, Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

CHAPTER 6. DISCUSSION

While this study was designed to answer four research questions, the results provided insight into other questions as well. The four research questions the study was designed to answer were “do the perceptions of emotional and informational parental support, the extent of tolerance in their parents’ religious practices, and whether their parents held more liberal or conservative political views affect the age at which the individual identifies as LGBTQ+?”, “does geographic region or locale explain the age that one identifies as LGBTQ+”, “is there a correlation between perceived parental support and perceived extent of tolerance in parental values and beliefs?”, and “does whether or not an individual’s parental figures hold a college degree and the frequency of their religious practices affect the age at which an individual comes out as LGBTQ+?”. Many of the findings answering these research questions were not statistically significant, but that may likely be due to the small sample size.

When comparing individuals by region, the results indicate that individuals in the West came out at a later age to themselves, another person, and their peers than individuals in the Southeast, Northeast, and from outside the US. Based on the literature review, one possible explanation for this may be that since victimization and bullying were reportedly lower in the West than the South or Midwest, individuals may be in a more relaxed environment and not feel the pressure to come out to others at an earlier age. They may not be experiencing the same pressures as individuals in the South or Midwest to find other LGBTQ+ individuals to bond and find a sense of belonging with.

Parental support variable means were highest in the Northeast, where religious frequency and the age of coming out was the lowest. This could mean that individuals whose parental

figures practiced religion less frequently felt a higher level of parental support and therefore came out at earlier ages than individuals in the West, Southeast, and outside the US.

The values and beliefs variables that make up the factors “tolerance” and “respect” were promoted most strongly by parental figures in the West, where the mean age of coming out was the highest. Perhaps the more traditionally liberal region provides community support and individuals may report lower rates of victimization and bullying, but the individual did not choose to disclose their sexual orientation or identity until a later age than individuals in the Southeast, Northeast, and outside the US. Individuals raised in the West may have been encouraged to explore more before they commit when developing their identity, which would have naturally taken more time, therefore individuals reached identity achievement at a later age.

The multiple linear regression using six predictors on the age of coming out showed a statistically significant effect of parental figures attaining a college degree. Individuals whose parental figures had attained a college degree came out at a later age than those individuals whose parental figures had not attained a college degree. Again, I feel that this may be due to encouragement from parental figures to explore more before committing during identity development. The regression models using dummy variables for geographic location and locale were not statistically significant, though it was expected that individuals in the Southeast or in more rural locations would come out at a later age, due to the research indicating that those individuals are bullied and victimized more so than individuals in the West or other locales. This was expected because individuals may wait until they are able to protect themselves or find others in the LGBTQ+ community to confide in and find support with before coming out. However, my analyses indicated that individuals raised in the West waited longer to come out.

The variable “religious frequency” showed a positive-low correlation with the parental support variables “comfort” and “information,” which were also positively, moderately-highly correlated with the variables making up parental values and beliefs. Individuals who recall their parental figures as supportive also seemed to recall their parental figures promoting tolerance and respect for others more strongly. Parental figures practicing religion more often were also viewed as providing more information and advice and individuals were also more comfortable going to their parental figures as needed with issues or concerns. This may be because practicing religion together can lay the foundation for strong parental-child relationships.

Finally, the variable “liberal to conservative” had negative-moderate correlations with the variables “LGBTQ+,” “equality,” and “marriage.” This is not a surprising results considering that conservative political views do not traditionally support the LGBTQ+ community, everyone being treated equally, or that marriage can be between anyone. Parental figures who hold these views should be conscious of the effect that may have on their child(ren) as they are developing their LGBTQ+ identity.

The results of this study can be used by family therapists and counselors, schools, and communities to better support individuals belonging to the LGBTQ+ community. These entities can use the findings in this study to tailor services by region. Family members need to be informed about how important their support is through the process of a family member coming out and finding their identity. Even if an individual has support within the family, they may not have the support of the community or at school, depending on their geographic location and the norms and values of the community and school culture. This information can be used by schools to ensure that proper, comprehensive policies are in place to ensure that LGBTQ+ students feel

included, safe, and supported while they are at school. Again, schools can use the results of this study in the same way therapists and counselors can, by tailoring policies to the needs of the region or locale.

Limitations

Limitations are present in this study. The LGBTQ+ community is a hidden population so the sample cannot be assumed as representative of the population. Relatively small sample size limited the types of statistical analysis that could be performed, and the number of statistically significant results obtained. This small and non-representative sample makes it difficult to obtain significant results and to generalize the finding to others. Participants were gathered through a convenience sample which did not allow for response rate to be determined since I do not know how many individuals were exposed to the opportunity to complete the survey. The participants were also asked to recall their experiences from the time at which they came out, which for some participants could have been decades ago, so their responses have the potential to be influenced by recall bias. The multiple linear regression results of Models 1, 2, and 3, used to answer the two of the research questions, were not statistically significant and should be interpreted with caution.

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Appendix

Survey: Home and Community Conditions that Contribute to Coming Out as LGBTQ+



Home and Community Conditions that Contribute to Coming Out as LGBTQ+

1. Demographics

Please answer the following questions.

1. What is your age?

- ☐ 18-22
- ☐ 23-27
- ☐ 28-32
- ☐ 33-37
- ☐ 38-42
- ☐ 43-47
- ☐ 48-54
- ☐ 55-59
- ☐ 60-69
- ☐ 70-79
- ☐ 80 years or older

2. Which race/ethnicity best describes you? (Please mark all that apply)

- ☐ American Indian or Alaskan Native
- ☐ Asian / Pacific Islander
- ☐ Black or African American
- ☐ Hispanic or Latino
- ☐ Native Hawaiian
- ☐ Pacific Islander
- ☐ White / Caucasian
- ☐ Other (please specify)

3. If you marked more than one race or ethnic group in the previous question, is there one group that you identify with more than the other(s)?

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes, I identify with _____ the most.

4. What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

- ☐ Less than high school degree
- ☐ High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)
- ☐ Some college but no degree
- ☐ Associate degree
- ☐ Bachelor degree
- ☐ Graduate degree

5. What is the highest level of school or the highest degree complete by any adult in the household in which you were raised?

- ☐ Less than high school degree
- ☐ High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)
- ☐ Some college but no degree
- ☐ Associate degree
- ☐ Bachelor degree
- ☐ Graduate degree

6. How do you describe yourself? (please mark all that apply)

- ☐ Asexual
- ☐ Bigender
- ☐ Bisexual
- ☐ Gay Man
- ☐ Gender Neutral
- ☐ Intersex
- ☐ Lesbian
- ☐ Pansexual
- ☐ Questioning
- ☐ Transgender Female to Male
- ☐ Transgender Male to Female
- ☐ Two-Spirited
- ☐ Other (please specify)

7. At what age did you come out as LGBTQ+ to yourself?

- ☐ 9 years old or younger
- ☐ 10-13 years old
- ☐ 14-17 years old
- ☐ 18-21 years old
- ☐ 22-25 years old
- ☐ 26-29 years old
- ☐ 30 years or older

8. At what age did you come out as LGBTQ+ to **another person** for the first time?

- ☐ 9 years old or younger
- ☐ 10-13 years old
- ☐ 14-17 years old
- ☐ 18-21 years old
- ☐ 22-25 years old
- ☐ 26-29 years old
- ☐ 30 years or older

9. What was this person's (from the previous question) relationship to you?

- ☐ Mother
- ☐ Father
- ☐ Sibling
- ☐ Close Friend
- ☐ Family member (aunt, uncle, cousin, grandparent, etc...)
- ☐ Counselor or other trusted adult
- ☐ Other (please specify)

10. At what age did you come out openly to your **peers or community** as LGBTQ+?

- ☐ 9 years old or younger
- ☐ 10-13 years old
- ☐ 14-17 years old
- ☐ 18-21 years old
- ☐ 22-25 years old
- ☐ 26-29 years old
- ☐ 30 years or older
- ☐ I have yet to come out openly to my peers or community



Home and Community Conditions that Contribute to Coming Out as LGBTQ+

2. Geographic Location & Locale

Many of the survey questions from this point forward will ask about when you were "growing up". To define this time, please answer the questions while thinking about the time around when you came out to yourself as LGBTQ+.

11. What region did you primarily grow up in?

- ☐ **Northeast:** Maine, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Hampshire, Vermont, New York, Delaware, Maryland
- ☐ **Southeast:** West Virginia, Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, Florida
- ☐ **Southwest:** Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Arizona
- ☐ **West:** Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, Washington, Oregon, Utah, Nevada, California, Alaska, Hawaii
- ☐ **Midwest:** Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, Missouri, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, North Dakota
- ☐ Outside of the U.S. (please specify)

12. How would you describe the community that you primarily grew up in?

- ☐ Coastal
- ☐ Inland
- ☐ Island
- ☐ Rural
- ☐ Suburban
- ☐ Urban

13. What type of household did you grow up in?

- ☐ Blended (step parents)
- ☐ Extended (grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc...)
- ☐ Foster family
- ☐ Group home
- ☐ Single father
- ☐ Single mother
- ☐ Traditional (both parents)
- ☐ Other (please specify)



Home and Community Conditions that Contribute to Coming Out as LGBTQ+

3. Support System

Some of the questions will also ask you about the adults that raised you. There will be questions for adult #1 and adult #2. If more than two adults raised you, please answer these questions for the two adults that impacted (either positively or negatively) you the most around that time when you came out as LGBTQ+ to yourself. If only one adult raised you, please only answer the questions for adult #1.

14. How comfortable were you going to **adult #1** with any problem or issue?

Not at all comfortable	Somewhat comfortable, depending on the problem	Moderately comfortable	Very comfortable
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

15. Was **adult #1** someone you could depend on to listen when you needed to talk?

Not at all	Somewhat, depending on what I wanted to talk about	Usually	Always
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

16. Was **adult #1** someone that would provide information or advice about a situation when you needed it?

Not at all	Somewhat, depending on the situation	Usually	Always
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

17. How comfortable were you going to **adult #2** with any problem or issue?

Not at all comfortable	Somewhat comfortable, depending on the problem	Moderately comfortable	Very comfortable
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

18. Was **adult #2** someone you could depend on to listen when you needed to talk?

Not at all	Somewhat, depending on what I wanted to talk about	Usually	Always
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

19. Was **adult #2** someone that would provide information or advice about a situation when you needed it?

Not at all	Somewhat, depending on the situation	Usually	Always
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

20. Do you feel that you had access to support at home or in the community in which you grew up?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ No, but I had support elsewhere. (please specify)



Home and Community Conditions that Contribute to Coming Out as LGBTQ+

4. Values and Beliefs

Some of the questions will also ask you about the adults that raised you. There will be questions for adult #1 and adult #2. If more than two adults raised you, please answer these questions for the two adults that impacted (either positively or negatively) you the most around that time when you came out as LGBTQ+ to yourself. If only one adult raised you, please only answer the questions for adult #1.

21. What was the primary religion of **adult #1**?

- ☐ Agnosticism
- ☐ Atheism
- ☐ Buddhism
- ☐ Christianity
- ☐ Hinduism
- ☐ Islam
- ☐ Judaism
- ☐ Nonreligious
- ☐ Other (please specify)

22. How often did **adult #1** attend religious services when you were growing up?

- ☐ 2+ times per week
- ☐ 1 time per week
- ☐ 1-3 times per month
- ☐ Less than once a month
- ☐ Rarely, but they practiced at home
- ☐ Never

23. How strongly did **adult #1** promote the following:

	Not at all	Weakly	Moderately	Strongly
Showing kindness to everyone, no matter the person's beliefs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Differences among people should be appreciated.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is okay to be LGBTQ+.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Everyone should be treated equally.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Marriage can be between anyone.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

24. What was the primary religion of **adult #2**?

- ☐ Agnosticism
- ☐ Atheism
- ☐ Buddhism
- ☐ Christianity
- ☐ Hinduism
- ☐ Islam
- ☐ Judaism
- ☐ Nonreligious
- ☐ Other (please specify)

25. How often did **adult #2** attend religious services when you were growing up?

- ☐ 2+ times per week
- ☐ 1 time per week
- ☐ 1-3 times per month
- ☐ Less than once a month
- ☐ Rarely, but they practiced at home
- ☐ Never

26. How strongly did **adult #2** promote the following:

	Not at all	Weakly	Moderately	Strongly
Showing kindness to everyone, no matter the person's beliefs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Differences among people should be appreciated.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is okay to be LGBTQ+.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Everyone should be treated equally.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Marriage can be between anyone.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

27. Do you feel that the values of the household you grew up in supported or stopped you from coming out as LGBTQ+? Please explain.

Supported me, because ...

Stopped me, because ...



Home and Community Conditions that Contribute to Coming Out as LGBTQ+

5. Political Views

Some of the questions will also ask you about the adults that raised you. There will be questions for adult #1 and adult #2. If more than two adults raised you, please answer these questions for the two adults that impacted (either positively or negatively) you the most around that time when you came out as LGBTQ+ to yourself. If only one adult raised you, please only answer the questions for adult #1.

28. While you were growing up, which political party did **adult #1** identify as?

- ☐ Democrat
- ☐ Independent
- ☐ Republican
- ☐ Adult #1 did not identify with a political party
- ☐ Other (please specify)

29. While you were growing up, how often did you hear **adult #1** discuss politics or their political views?

- | Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Often |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

30. How liberal or conservative do you feel **adult #1's** political views were?

Very Liberal	Neutral	Very Conservative
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="range"/>	

31. While you were growing up, which political party did **adult #2** identify as?

- ☐ Democrat
- ☐ Independent
- ☐ Republican
- ☐ Adult #1 did not identify with a political party
- ☐ Other (please specify)

32. While you were growing up, how often did you hear **adult #2** discuss politics or their political views?

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

33. How liberal or conservative do you feel **adult #2's** political views were?

Very Liberal	Neutral	Very Conservative	
<input type="radio"/>			

34. Which political party do you identify with?

- ☐ Democrat
- ☐ Independent
- ☐ Republican
- ☐ I do not identify with a political party
- ☐ Other (please specify)



Home and Community Conditions that Contribute to Coming Out as LGBTQ+

6. Comments or Concerns

Thank you for completing this survey! Please leave any comments or concerns you have below.

35. Did you find anything confusing or offensive about this survey? Please explain.

